DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 072 486 CS 500 134

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TITLE	Literature as Revolt and Revolt as Literature: Three Studies in the Rhetoric of Non-Oratorical Forms. Proceedings of the Annual University of Minnesota Spring Symposium in Speech-Communication (4th, Minneapolis, May 3, 1969).
INSTITUTION	Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Dept. of Speech, Communication, and Theatre Arts.
PUB DATE	3 May 69
NOTE	43p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Dept. of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts, 317 Folwell Hall, Univ. of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn. 55455 ($1.50)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*American Literature; *Analytical Criticism; Civil Rights; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Literary Analysis; Novels; Persuasive Discourse; Poetry; Social Attitudes; *Social Environment
IDENTIFIERS	Dickey (James); Hawthorne (Nathaniel); King (Martin Luther)

ABSTRACT

The theme of this symposium was the classic concern about the rhetoric-poetic relationship as applied to modern communication problems. In the first paper, "The 'Vision' of Martin Luther King," Edwin Black postulates that Dr. King contributed to the development of a "revolutionary literature" because of his impact, not only on the public consciousness, but especially on rhetorical procedures and the nature of public persuasion in this nation. In the second paper, "The Open Poem is a Now Poem: Dickey's "May Day Sermon,'" Thomas O. Sloan analyzes the poetry of James Dickey in terms of its structure of "immediacy," wherein the "poem creates the character of its presence" through sound and thus "wreaks violence on our conventional notions of literary language." In the third paper, "Literature and Revolution: The Case of "The Scarlet Letter,'" David W. Noble first defines the attitude of the modern world to literature and science as one that sets these two disciplines apart from any cultural pattern and views the work of the artist or scientist as self-sufficient; he then analyzes Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel as an attempt to restore literature to an understanding of the importance of the culture and as a criticism of modern individualism and realism. (RN)

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Literature as Revolt and Revolt as Literature: Three Studies in the Rhetoric Of Non-Oratorical Forms

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
FOURTH ANNUAL
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
SPRING SYMPOSIUM IN SPEECH-COMMUNICATION

May 3, 1969
Minneapolis, Minnesota

CS 500 134

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Table of Contents

Foreword 5

The "Vision" of Martin Luther King 7
Edwin Black

The Open Poem Is A Now Poem: Dickey's May Day Sermon 17
Thomas O. Sloan

Literature and Revolution: The Case of The Scarlet Letter 32
David W. Noble

Foreword

Beginning in the spring of 1966, the Speech-Communication area of the University of Minnesota Department of Speech, Communication, and Theatre Arts has sponsored a yearly symposium on a topic of current interest in speech-communication. On May 3, 1969, Professors Edwin Black of the University of Wisconsin, Thomas O. Sloan, of the University of Illinois, and David W. Noble of the University of Minnesota presented papers on the topic, "Revolt as Literature and Literature as Revolt." The papers were followed by a luncheon after which Professors Emily Hannah of St. Cloud State College and David W. Thompson of the University of Minnesota joined the three guests in a discussion of the papers. An open forum concluded the program.

More than one hundred scholars from Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin attended the symposium. We are glad to be able to respond to their requests by publishing these papers.

Especially instrumental in arranging for the 1969 Minnesota Spring Symposium in Speech-Communication were E. W. Ziebarth, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Kenneth L. Graham, Chairman of the Department of Speech, Communication, and Theatre Arts, and Frederick E. Berger, Director of the Department of Conferences and Institutes. Planning committee members were Elaine Moen, James W. Pratt, David W. Thompson, David H. Smith, and Robert L. Scott.

The problem of the relationship between rhetoric and poetic is one that has worried scholars in this century considerably. It may extend back into antiquity at least as far as the time in which Gorgias of Leontini, and others, began to borrow devices from the poets to adorn their public address. Charles S. Baldwin's famous *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic,* and many other books and essays, give evidence of this fundamental concern, then and now.

Today the questions that spring from the basic problem are multiplied and compounded by the existence of the electronic mass media which seem to have brought new forms into being as well as focused old ones intensely in instantaneous transmission to millions. Those who cannot agree with Marshall McLuhan's assertion of identity at least sense an exhilarating or dreadful acceleration of the intermingling of form and content.

We may be especially struck with the impossibility of statements commensurate with the spectacle of wars in Southeast Asia in color on the 10 p.m. news, or with the melees on our urban streets viewed, perhaps even proded by the everpresent TV cameras.

Where is the verbal poetic to match the rhythms of a moratorium march and rally? Where is the verbal rhetoric to equal the pathos of a prayer vigil ringed by the police and their watchful dogs? And what is the sense of trying to draw old lines of form and formality anew? But is there any sense and sanity in not trying?

Of course we did not ask our three guests to unravel the mystery of the ancient problem of rhetoric-poetic any more than we asked them to encompass in some explanatory net all the mutations we now struggle to understand. We asked them, rather, to ponder the old difficulty and the seemingly myriad contemporary ramifications and to choose some particular case to study. This each guest did admirably.

We are pleased to present these three studies. The papers are printed in the order in which they were presented, May 3, 1969.

THE "VISION" OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

by Edwin Black

The literature of revolt is not always what it seems. Literature —especially rhetorical literature—does not always make accurate or reliable claims about itself; it sometimes dissembles. Literature that claims itself to be revolutionary is not necessarily telling the truth. It may only be posing. After all, a lively parakeet can be trained to gabble a modish slogan.

Literature is not revolutionary by being merely bellicose or manichean or obscene or noisey or paranoidal or dogmatically self-confident. There are, in fact, circumstances in which each one of those characteristics is fashionable, and I do not think anything can be both fashionable and revolutionary at the same time. When a formulation or a style has become fashionable, it means that it has stopped being revolutionary, if it ever was. Indeed, there are specimens of discourse bearing the trappings of radicalism that may be quite anti-revolutionary in their effects—discourses that work by absorbing the conscientious energies of their audiences, leaving them content with purely symbolic gestures. When, for example, Julian Beck's Living Theatre induces the sophomore in the audience to strip to his jockey shorts, I do not believe that a revolution has occurred. Quite the contrary. That sophomore, by becoming temporarily convinced that a modification of dress is equivalent to a revolutionary act, by attaching importance to his now exposing in the public theatre what he has long exposed at the public beach, has lost whatever grip he may have had on what revolution really is, and he is thereby doomed to remain a sophomore even longer. Revolutions have more to them than sophomores in jockey shorts.

If we are usefully to consider revolutionary literature, we have at the outset to make a distinction between literature that is genuinely revolutionary and literature that simply mimics the former's superficial characteristics. Some literature produces convulsions in the world; and some merely wears a *bonnet rouge* to the Rotary meeting.

Truly revolutionary literature proves its character by bringing an audience to some new form of sensibility, to some novel and pervasive and fateful perspective that was not there before. Or, alternatively, literature may be revolutionary in a formal sense, altering somehow the very way in which literature itself functions, leaving its marks so decisively on the language that sociopolitical change is a secondary and residual consequence. Such works are rare, and they are inevitably succeeded by the literary camp followers of revolution: derivative works that parrot the themes or

formal patterns of revolutionary literature and that constitute tokens of a newly established fashion. The effects of this latter sort of literature are not radical. They are rather like what the lady wearing the single strand of matching pearls was overheard to report: "My dear, I never looked at a Campbell's soup can until Andy Warhol showed it to me."[1]

Such works are the epideictic sequels of revolutionary literature. They rehearse its forms; they celebrate its triumphs; they confirm its appeal. Such works may be quite exhilarating in their display of fervor; they may even be impressive in their artfulness; but they are more the symptoms of an influence than the substance of one, and they want distinguishing from the literature of revolt.

I suggest that we call this second sort of literature "Thermidorean." Thermidor, you will recall, was the month in the French revolutionary calendar in which Robespierre fell from power, and the term has since come into generic use to refer to the period after a revolution when the revolutionary values are growing respectable, and daily life is becoming less heroic and more routine. Crane Brinton called Thermidor, ". . . a convalescence from the fever of revolution."[2] It is the period when a society, irretrievably committed to the new arrangements and the altered outlook embodied in revolutionary tenets, is playing out the string of this commitment by consolidating changes that the revolution has wrought.

Patently, literature, and especially rhetorical literature, has a role to play in this process of consolidation, but the role is not that of generating revolt. Rather, it is a task of confirming and exploring what Trotsky called "the new consciousness arising out of the Revolution."[3] It is, as I mentioned before, an essentially epideictic function: celebrative, reassuring, derivative, and beginning to show the paunch of conventionality.

Granting the distinction between revolutionary and Thermidorian literature, if now we seek paradigms of truly revolutionary literature, one name that must surely occur to us is that of Martin Luther King. That he produced—that he was in a sense that I hope to clarify an active participant in—truly revolutionary literature, I think there can be no doubt. Let me here remind you that I earlier postulated two ways in which literature may be revolutionary: it may be so either by imposing on an audience some new and significant perspective, or by altering somehow the way in which literature itself functions. Whatever dispute there may be on the extent or novelty of King's impact on our consciousness, there can be no doubt about his effects on the conventions of rhetorical procedure in this country. His influence on the character of public

persuasion is by itself sufficient to regard King's rhetorical efforts as revolutionary.

There is no need here to detail King's impact on rhetorical practices. The effects surround us. Starting with the public boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, King and his associates in the fifties adapted to the American scene the sit-in, the march, the whole range of persuasive activities associated with the Civil Rights Movement. It is not, of course, that these techniques had no precedents in American history, but the particular amalgam of them was unique. And in 1964, a continent away from Montgomery, in Berkeley, white students—many of them veterans of King's campaigns in Mississippi—began the application of those same rhetorical techniques to issues and institutions quite remote from the concerns of the Movement. We all know what has happened since. We know that the application of those techniques, sometimes with variations that King would deplore, has become a daily and national occurrence. We know that the conventions of public persuasion in the United States are quite different now from what they were fifteen years ago, and that many of the changes are attributable to what Martin Luther King taught us about how we may persuade and how we ought to be persuaded. That rhetorical legacy alone warrants the consideration of King in any treatment of revolutionary literature.

Revolutionary, yes; but *literature?* The question may well arise because, though King left a very considerable body of written work—speeches, articles and books—it was the extra-verbal dimension of his campaign—the images on the television screen—that we may best remember. Indeed, I shall go even further and suggest that by common, belletristic standards, Martin Luther King was often a clumsy and overblown stylist, that much of his writing, though it was grandly ambitious, will not bear up under intense scrutiny.

Have a good look at the much admired "I have a dream" speech. Note the tendency to mix metaphors. Note the passé, the occasionally hackneyed character of some of the figures. Note, above all, the uneven quality of the composition, with the ingenious (the "heat" imagery, for example) heaped alongside the trite (the "sunlit path," for example). And does it matter? No, of course not. It does not matter in the least. Show me a man who can *hear* that speech and not be stirred to his depths, and I'll show you a man who has no depths to stir.

Belletristic standards are not commensurable with King's speech, nor with King's rhetorical career. And what I have in mind in denying the relevance of belletristic standards is not, I assure you, yet another one of those banal distinctions between oral and

written prose that so satisfy the tidy yearnings of schoolmasters. Rather, I have in mind the particular case of King and the fact that what affected his audiences was not just his prose (they could have heard its equal from a hundred others), but the whole persona: the role that King was playing in an epic drama and the character that he explicated in that role.

It is nc accident that in focussing on a Black leader—King or any others—we find ourselves thinking in terms of role and character. It is no accident because the two great themes that have haunted the modern rhetoric of race in this country are the themes of Identity and Power, and the first of these—the theme of Identity—is bound up with King's public image. (I do not believe, incidentally, that the "crisis of identity" and its attendant and urgent wish to forge for oneself a character that is whole and good and strong is a preoccupation unique to Black people. It seems rather to be an endemic American preoccupation, acutely experienced by various groups at various times, and chronic with the young.)

Behind Martin Luther King's campaigns, as with the younger Black Power advocates who were to lay claim to his following in the later years of his life, was the persistent effort to establish a new identity for the Black Man in America. King's version of this identity was the Black Man-as-Moral Hero. How else can one characterize the demands that King made upon himself and his followers? Accept abuse and suffer violence without the show of hostility; bear witness through one's acts and one's overt virtue to the righteousness of the cause: these are unquestionably the marks of moral heroism, pragmatically warranted by the faith that the bearing of witness will persuade. Such a warrant constitutes, if not exactly a rhetorical theory, at least an idea about social control, and we do well to investigate its provenance.

There are two assumptions behind this idea—one psychological and the other ontological—that solicit our attention. The psychological assumption was of the efficacy of what I want to call the Svengalian effect, and the ontological assumption—more familiar to those who followed King's career—was that the world is innately just. The two assumptions, while distinguishable, are intimately related.

Let us consider the less familiar assumption first: the Svengalian effect. It was in the latter part of the 18th century that F. A. Mesmer, a Viennese physician, propounded the doctrine of animal magnetism, a clever and wholly mistaken doctrine designed to account for what we now know to have been hypnosis. Throughout the 19th century, Mesmer's doctrine of animal magnetism, relentlessly modified by his many disciples, fascinated a vast public in this country and throughout Europe, and the more the doctrine

was modified to attribute special "magnetic" powers to the mesmerist, as hypnotists were then called, the more fascinating it became. The rage of popular interest in this phenomenon probably reached its peak near the end of the 19th century with the publication of George DuMaurier's immensely successful novel, *Trilby*. Trilby was an innocent maiden who fell under the influence of an unforgettable character named Svengali. By placing her in hypnotic trances, Svengali was able to make Trilby sing more ravishingly than the nightengale. Trilby's career flourished until, alas, Svengali died, and without her master, Trilby could sing no more.

Svengali hypnotized Trilby by fastening his magnetic eye on her. The raw potency within him—his magnetism—radiated out through his retina and entranced his subject. The eye was the window into the soul, and by 1894, when the novel *Trilby* was published, animal magnetism was popularly thought to be a purely psychic power—a potency of the soul of the hypnotist that could subjugate the soul of his subject if transmitted from eye to eye.

As this pattern of dominant and submissive wills transmitting their relationships through the organs of sight came closer to us in time, it also acquired a distinct moral color. In melodrama, so popular in the 19th and earlier 20th centuries, it became the virtuous soul that possessed a kind of prepotency. The virtuous soul could not, as with Svengali, subjugate a feminine will to a masculine one, but it did have the power to render wickedness impotent. When virtue finally triumphed in the melodrama, the villain did not quit the stage with an amble. He skulked off, turned away from the virtuous hero, both hands held up before his head, palms outward as if to turn away the rays of goodness which, if they penetrated him, would destroy his identity by transforming him into some other and better persona.

The same principle turns up even later in the Dracula movies, where an innocent needs only to hold up a crucifix to ward off the fiend. Dracula cannot bear to look at the crucifix without being destroyed. The icon bears the prepotency that, in earlier popular drama, a persona may have borne.

The Svengalian effect—the principle that a virtuous spirit is prepotent—was a conviction that Martin Luther King held and acted upon. He repeatedly voiced his belief in the capacity of heroic emanations to destroy evil by transmuting it into a more benign form. It was his faith that a people sick with prejudice could not persist in their sickness once they had filled their eyes with moral heroism. This principle guaranteed the efficacy of bearing witness and constituted the secular and pragmatic sanction for suffering the violence of bigots. And the principle is not nearly so archaic as some of my earlier examples may have suggested.

To this day, the non-verbal expression of shame or embarrassment is to cast the eyes downward, away from whomever one has offended. And to this day also we have an elaborate set of moral inferences that we draw from a shifty eye or from a steady gaze.

Less liberated from the moral economy behind melodrama than we may like to suppose, we still are prone to require a steady gaze from anyone whom we regard as honest or straightforward. When we confront the shifty-eyed, our inference is either that the person is not honest with us, or that he is shy. In sum, we are disposed to infer, from our reading of eyes, something about another's attitude toward us, at least in interpersonal transactions.

Whatever the psychological foundations of this language of the eyes—and I have no idea what they may be—the language itself has been firmly established by the interrelated conventions of popular theatre and common behavior as expressive of internal states. We take the behavior of eyes as a reflection of attitude. More to the point, we take it as a reflection of attitude toward ourselves if we are the principal object in the field of vision, and in consequence we attitudinize responsively. We form attitudes of our own towards the person whose eyes are expressing his attitudes.

As you know, children play the game of out-staring one another, and the winner—the one whose gaze has not flinched while his opponent has turned away in defeat—has triumphed in a kind of test of strength. The outcome of the contest is not arbitrary and unmeaning, like a coin toss. Neither has it involved a trial of skill, as we ordinarily understand and respect skill. Rather, it involves the establishment and confirmation of a relationship of power. The outcome of the game registers on the human pecking order. Its effects may be short-lived, but the immediate reactions to the game are, however temporary, as if a hierarchy had been established, a relationship of masterly and deferential or of better and worse.

The game of out-staring is not confined to children, though when adults play it, it is filled with complex moral meaning. I remember once, in a restaurant, filling with rage at a woman at a nearby table who would not take her eyes off me and whose stare was coldly unflirtatious. Later, in a better light, I saw that she evidently had a thyroid problem, and that her tumid, unblinking eyes were the effects of an illness. The discovery filled me with remorse, not for anything I had done, but for the harsh moral judgment I had made. That moral judgment and the grounds for it are both worth notice.

Once we recognize the existence of these common conversations of eyes and the little games of competition and seduction we play with them, it is less difficult to understand the extension of these

games into larger scale maneuvers where the fixity of a stare may have political consequences.

It is not the eye alone that has potency in these games; it is the eye as an instrument of the will. The games are dances of pure social relationship, and their issue is always a social arrangement of some kind. It is evident, then, that the subtle minuet of gazes and glances may be surrogate to a more prepossessing social contest, and may be invested with all the significance of a much larger pattern of relationships. And it is evident, too, that the game of eyes may be played out on a larger stage than the interpersonal, involving grosser senses more accessible to a vast public than is the look in an eye.

An actor on a stage or a speaker on a platform cannot do much with their eyes. In a close-up on a movie screen, an actor may transmit a heavy freight of information with the slightest nuance of an eyelid; but that same actor on a stage—an inch tall figure from the balcony—has to employ grosser movements to transmit an equal amount of information, and this latter condition was King's. The rules that govern the game of eyes governed also King's extra-verbal strategies, but the vastness of his theatre and the remoteness of his audience, even with the help of television, required that King's moves in the game be large and perceptible from a distance.

His role in that game was continually reinforced by his verbal messages, especially by the recurrence through his speeches of a virtually Zoroastrian imagery in which light and darkness grappled for the soul of the country and, in unconscious defiance of Stokely Carmichael's "Black is beautiful" slogan, it was light that was bound to win. But most important, he showed himself, unflinching, amidst peril. He made himself a moral hero and, to multiply the risks, he conducted repeated public demonstrations of the heroism. He constantly sought visibility in order to crush a visual iniquity. The consequences were to assert a Black identity of exalted stature, and to compel his adversaries either to acknowledge the rectitude of his cause or to turn their eyes from him.

Earlier I mentioned that there was a second assumption accompanying King's belief in the Svengalian effect, and that assumption was of a world innately just. His phrase, "Unmerited suffering is redemptive," was but one of his many expressions of this assumption. "Unmerited suffering": The implication is that there may be suffering that *is* merited, and hence that even pleasures and pains are subject to the principle of equity. "Unmerited suffering is redemptive": But even if willful misdeeds may not have been expended to purchase pain, even if the pain is gratuitous, then the pain will constitute the payment, and redemption will be

what is bought. And what value is there in this compensation? Simply, the prepotency of soul that the redeemed possess; their radiant power to render ineffectual their unredeemed enemies and to triumph over them by transforming their wickedness. And what do the wicked expend? They pay to the last measure, for it is themselves that finally they lose. They do not possess themselves. Rather, they are possessed. They have identities, but too fragile to survive the power of virtue.

King did, then, directly engage the two great issues of Identity and Power. His resolution of the first was to propound an image of a moral hero displaying the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace; and his resolution of the second was to postulate a world in which spiritual grace had secular puissance.

King's position was expressed with perfect appositeness in the sermonic style. That style itself would have evoked many of the tonal associations of his position, even if he had not so explicitly held the position. And his extra-verbal tactics were, of course, virtual extensions of the position itself.

His movement found special resonance with three groups: members of the clergy, idealistic white young people, and Blacks. The clergy—but a short time ago, a politically negligible group in this country—found embodied in the Movement, in every facet of the Movement—its style, its strategies, its aspirations, its demands on its adherents, and its unvoiced assumptions—a complete expression of their own faith, consonant to the last detail.

The white young, passing through their own crisis of identity in a society that has evolved no rite of passage and that has, in consequence, made youth a time of anguished estrangement, found in the persona postulated by the Movement an austere and splendid potentiality for themselves: comporting with their anguish in its austerity, and compensating for their estrangement in its quiet certitude. The intoxication of that heroic model has not yet been spent. The best of them still want to be heroes. But, reared in their secular, suburban homes, these children of accountants and bankers and osteopaths could not indefinitely sustain the spiritual ontology. The Movement met the personal needs of the white young, but being young is transistory, and the culture that, through an oversight of tradition, created a social hiatus for them during their late teens, was ready with pre-established routines to claim them again in their early twenties—that, or disengage them totally with a war that corrupted what it did not kill.

Finally, the Blacks. They had not been given by this country a single role to play that was unchallenged, not a solitary model that did not involve either social abrasion or self-abasement. While the white young were without clear indices of social defini-

tion because they were young, the Blacks were equally bereft because they were black, and youth, after all, is a condition from which one recovers. The Blacks, then, responded to King's model. Thousands of them endured the trial of heroism—suffered, accepted, intensified the inner fire, and bought redemption. But some of the Black young found, in the end, that the ontic side of King's ideology was not working, that their world was not innately just. They began evolving a new foundation for asserting their claims, and they sought different models for their guidance.

Power, of course, is still a theme—very much a theme. And yet, the treatment of this theme seems in some ways more equivocal than it had been with King. King did not much talk of power, and when he did, it seemed almost with distress at the necessity; but he displayed power—his sense of power—repeatedly. But now that we hear much more of power, we seem to see much less of it. That is probably because a different sort of power—a more elusive and difficult kind of power—is now involved.

Any really satisfactory account of Martin Luther King's career as a revolutionary literateur would have to include as a central theme what I have omitted here: the Christian religious tradition from which he drew so heavily. But there was a historical deviation from Christian theology that may help to illuminate the denouement of that career.

There were forms of Manicheanism which held that the devil himself deserved reverence because he created opportunities for God to do good. There was an insight buried in that heresy: the acknowledgment that a really grand and cosmic tension required really grand and cosmic countervailing forces, that a foil worthy of God had to be a divine equivalent. Hercules, after all, is not exalted by the act of swatting a fly. The dialectic of heroism requires great adversities, and great adversaries to administer them. King, however, sought the heroic mode in a bourgeois democracy where his enemies were cautious little men fighting with the subterranean weapons of obfuscation, delay, and genteel equivocation. King needed something worthier to hurl himself against.

And even the manner of his dying was a cheat. The violent killing of a hero provides a sense of disquieting completeness. There is a dreadful symmetry to the horror for which the history of martyrdom has prepared us. But to be shot from the shadows by a petty thief frustrates the pattern. It is to be cheated of a final testing of strength; it is to be robbed of a discovery of one's limits and thus prevented from that ultimate realization of identity that a killing struggle makes possible.

The death was tragic, but not tragic on a legendary scale. It was tragic in being an irremediable misfortune—tragic in the way

that the gallant tramp at the end of *City Lights* is tragic, for he is crushed not by the combined strengths of his formidable adversaries, but by the expression of an attitude so petty that to defend against it would be an unheroic preoccupation.

King was compelled to play his role in a world that will neither acknowledge the inherent power of virtue and thus endow it with power through that very acknowledgment, nor reserve for the heroic actor an ambiance comporting with his measure.

Perhaps our public life is too tawdry for heroism. Perhaps there are too many intermediaries between the hero and his audience, for no matter how pure his own acts, there are always the flashbulbs to remind him of the parasites battening on his passion. And even the death of this hero—this good man—was of such a character that our mourning had to be infected with shame.

The European liberals who perished in the torture chambers of the Gestapo, died greatly. They were cheated of their lives, but not of their deaths because they were slain by a state machine that was unadulterated evil, and their final struggle was in no way compromised. Their deaths in such circumstances redeemed their values. To be murdered by Nazis was a morbid honor. The only honors possible in a diseased state are morbid ones. But King did not postulate that the state in which he played out his role was so diseased. Sickly, yes; but bearing within it the capacity for health, and it was to that capacity that King therapeutically addressed himself.

King, however, was killed by a man of no moral significance. His death resolved nothing; it completed nothing. It cleansed no witness and fulfilled no irony. Its only lesson was that the moral hero that King became is unsuited to our world, and that though we may flirt with drama in our public life, we do not provide it a theatre in which it can be played out. If we had a public life in which King's heroism could win final triumphs, it would be a more convulsive life than it was when he was murdered. It would be a life of splendid and fateful battles, a more perilous and passionate life: disruptive, fatiguing and harsh. It would be a life of burning cities and angry mobs. It would, in short, be the sort of public life that began developing in this country after King's Movement had passed its apogee. The violence of that life would have repelled King, but its moral intensity is a measure of the revolution that King has wrought in us all.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Quoted by Robert Mazzocco in his review of Andy Warhol's *a*, *The New York Review of Books*, XII (April 24, 1969), 34.
[2] Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1957), 215.
[3] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1960), 228.

THE OPEN POEM IS A NOW POEM: DICKEY'S MAY DAY SERMON

by Thomas O. Sloan

Life has passed judgment on James Dickey: he has been called "the hottest of emerging U. S. poets."[1] But *Life's* critical accolades are always dubious honors—even when they are not disproved by *Time*. Anyway, to call a poet "hot" is surely ambiguous in this age of McLuhan. "Hot" in the McLuhan sense—spoken of a medium with high definition requiring only passive receptivity—is hardly the word to be applied to modern poetry generally, Dickey's poetry particularly. In fact, Dickey could be called a very "cool" poet: the printed versions of his later poems do not allow passive receptivity; though his words appear to the eye with the high definition of modern print, they march across the page with the grammatical obscurity of spontaneous speech literally transcribed. Here we may move toward my thesis. Dickey has a deep sense of what speech, the spoken word, is. In his longest poem, which is the subject of this paper, it is speech which is both the agent of change in the poem's action and the poet's major rhetorical strategy. The printed version is only a bare abstraction of sound, the true medium of the poem—and this spoken medium is both the message and the massage.

I should like to begin my examination of this strategy by placing into perspective the visual implications of the term which Dickey himself has applied to his later poems.

Dickey calls his work "open" poems. The term may be a good one, for it may present to the mind's eye an image of an open area or a place where there are no barriers or at least easily transcendable ones. Indeed, *May Day Sermon* is about a breaking-down of barriers, including those imposed by rigid categories of thought. Its long title itself indicates that the speaker has left one category or confinement to address herself to a larger audience: *May Day Sermon to the Women of Gilmer County, Georgia, by a Woman Preacher Leaving the Baptist Church.*[2]

Because it is a poem about "openness," it is a poem of revolt and as such fits well the topic of our symposium. As a matter of fact, some of its first readers found it literally revolting. Soon after the poem first appeared in the *Atlantic* in April, 1967, a man who signed himself "the founder of the Poetry Society of New Hampshire" wrote a letter to the editor insisting that the *Atlantic* apologize to "the good people of the Baptist denomination as well as to the high art of poetry."[3] When barriers fall within this poem, reverberations apparently challenge the stability of other barriers

as well, such as those between real and imaginary, literature and society, even (*pace* Misters Arnold and Eliot) poetry and religion. Some barriers in the establishment seem as susceptible to sound as the walls of Jericho.

It is *sound* which brings down the barriers within the poem and which, for some people, sets off threatening echoes. Consequently, the visuality of "openness" cannot fully express what happens in this poem and how it happens—or, for that matter, to express what Dickey himself means by "openness." To realize what happens in this poem we must conceive of its experience in terms of something more than spatial analogies. After all, sound—particularly the sound of the spoken word—does not merely resonate through space, it affects our sense of time as well. These *spatial and temporal* effects cannot be compressed into simple visual models. I wish to take this argument several steps farther—into the realm where oral interpreters live: these effects, because they constitute a process or field of energy, are at odds with the effects of written language.

Writers such as H. L. Chaytor, McLuhan, and Walter Ong' have persuasively argued that it is difficult for us to understand the precise, creative nature of oral language so long as between the idea of it and its actuality falls the shadow of literacy. When we think of a word, we tend to think of it as a sequence of letters —linear, abstract, and objective, qualities inherent in the great orderly systems of thought which have produced modern ways of living and dying. Visual language scientizes speech. It anatomizes it, presents only its skeleton. Certainly it is true that from this skeleton the full body of the utterance may be reconstructed. But if McLuhan is right, many of us gave up the work of reconstruction and for generations preferred to wander among the dry bones of discourse. Some poets, like Blake, pointed the way out. But the major shift in our thinking about language did not come about until the new electronic media ushered in the post-Gutenberg era and began what may be the most significant revolution of our age.

Perhaps we should call Dickey's poem also a "now" poem. Like the "now" generation, it makes its presence felt. And it does this by being very much in with the current revolution in language —as I hope to show with this argument: *Dickey gives time and space the temporality and the fluidity of the spoken word.* The poem defies a silent perusal of its words on the printed page. It demands an oral reading. Once the printed page is translated into sound, the poem becomes what our vernacular calls "a going thing" or "a happening"—a process within which space is open, objects and images are changeable, and time is non-linear. Through the spoken word, the poem is made to happen *now.* This strategy does violence to the "literacy" of our "literary" language.

That other kind of violence, which pervades the images and actions of the poem, is a subject I shall return to later. The violence which demands our attention first is that defiant illiteracy which is Dickey's major rhetorical strategy.

In their study entitled "The Consequences of Literacy," Jack Goody and Ian Watt argue, in part, that the temporal effect of written or printed discourse is to create a wedge between the past and the present moment.[5] In an oral culture, the past is always present. Because there are no written records, there can be no critique of the past, no searching through evidence for the way things "really were." And if what is known of the past seems irrelevant, or curious, or out of step with the present, the teller merely alters his story—not to make history fit the facts but to make history (perhaps we should read that as "his story") fit the needs and temper of the present moment. This is the world of the spoken word, before literacy causes the word to lose some of the force of its immediacy. In our literate, typographic culture a word is not only something which happens in time but also something which inhabits space and, more than that, something which can be fixed in space in such a way that it can serve as a tool to record previously lived experience, history that is now *past*. To understand an oral culture and to understand Dickey's poem we need to think of a word less as something that records and more as something that happens.

So far as Dickey's work is concerned, the "open" poem will always be a "now" poem whenever its medium is primarily the spoken word. Speech, Ong argues, is "necessarily an event, an action, an indication of the present use of power (since it is something going on), and thus is of a piece with other physical actuality."[6] When speech brings a world into existence, as in this poem, it makes objects after its own nature, fluid, in process of change and association, in time out of any mind. This world is by its nature "open." The temporality of speech is also the temporality of the "now," the present moment—both are most vividly realized at the instant when they are coming into existence, which is also the same instant when they cease to exist.

Of course, I am not arguing that Dickey's poem is an oral poem in the ancient meaning of the term. The poem is repeatable. Like a genuine revolutionary's, its voice will reverberate into the future. We have the printed record—though we will misapprehend if we mistake the printed record for the poem itself. In fact, our experience of the poem must lie in the tension between our literate responses to it as a repeatable object and our sense of it as a temporal event. The tension is analogous to the conflict within the poem's persona, the woman preacher, who sees the words of the Bible, who has read the law and the prophets, but who on the

other hand is aware of the insistent, contrary reality of her immediate emotions. Moreover, I am not even arguing that Dickey's poem is unique in the annals of printed poetry. We have always had two kinds of printed poems: poems of statement, which are aimed at locking into time a clear-cut observation about human experience; and poems of happening, which have sought to pervade the present moment with a meaningful pattern of experience. The former exploit the solidity and permanence of print, the latter the fluidity and temporality of speech. Dickey's poem belongs to the latter type. But the way he accomplishes his happening should heighten our modern awareness of speech as an existential process in literature. Speech is an existential process, so are poems of happening. But the name *literature* offers the comfortable reassurance that the speech has been literally transcribed. Herein lie those tensions I referred to earlier, which are necessarily a part of our *oral* approaches to any *literature*, but especially to poems of happening. We have printed poems—and shall have, for a long time. If the poet wishes to be a *maker*, as his ancient name implies, rather than, say, a *writer*, then the burden is on him to find the strategy whereby we shall be kept from confusing the printed record with the poem itself. The strategy reasserted and modernized in our own era by James Joyce and Ezra Pound is the strategy of the spoken word, particularly as heard in *extemporaneous speech*. The continuing successful use of this strategy accounts in part for the strangeness, even the obscurity of much modern poetry—including *May Day Sermon*.

Let us review Dickey's use of this strategy first in his own terms and then in the poem itself. The strategy was developed in his career, he tells us, in three stages. He realized, first, that a thin narrative thread woven into the fabric of a poem arouses a reader's curiosity, brings "into play his simple and fundamental interest in 'what happens next,' a curiosity that only narrative can supply and satisfy." Secondly, Dickey states, "I also discovered that I worked most fruitfully in cases in which there was no clear-cut distinction between what was actually happening and what was happening in the mind of a character in the poem. I meant to try to get a fusion of inner and outer states, of dream, fantasy, and illusion where everything partakes of the protagonist's mental processes and creates a single impression." The second idea disrupts the linearity of the first—for, as we shall see in this poem, the thin narrative thread is woven into a rich texture of sound that defies the inevitable past tense of narrative. "Everything" is to partake "of the protagonist's mental processes." And that means that whenever the protagonist is also the persona, the central speaker in the poem, everything is to partake of everything else. Not only time, but space barriers are to be crossed. In Dickey's work, these ideas led thirdly to the creation of what he calls "open"

poems, poems that achieve "an optimum 'presentational immediacy,' a compulsiveness in the presentation of the matter of the poem that would cause the reader to forget literary judgments entirely and simply experience.'" The final barriers to be crossed are the ones between the poet, the persona, the poem, and the reader. One is to be brought into the presence of the other, I believe, by means of the spoken word.

In turning now to *May Day Sermon* and speaking first of its temporal element, it will be useful to draw the distinction proposed by Robert Beloof, between *fictive* and *structural* time.[3] Fictive time is the time-in-the-story, the time encompassed by past events which are narrated within a poetic structure. Structural time is the time it takes to read the poem aloud. Fictive time in *May Day Sermon* encompasses a few hours on a late evening in spring in Georgia. Reduced to its minimum details, this is the story the woman preacher tells: A poor backwoods farmer, a righteous, firm, even fierce believer in the Bible ("The Lord's own man," the preacher calls him), became incensed when he discovered that his daughter had a secret lover—a one-eyed young mechanic who would come to the farm on his motorcycle. Enraged, the father lashed his nude daughter to a post in the barn and beat her with a willow branch. The daughter's screams of defiance and pain filled the night. Later she rose from her bed and, seizing an axe and an ice-pick, drove the axe through the father's head and the ice-pick through one of his eyes. Then, moving to the barn, she set all the animals free. Gathering up all her clothes, though still nude herself, she joined her lover on his motorcycle and sped off into the night. So told, the story has the flat gruesomeness of a newspaper account, its potentially mythic features unredeemable even by the present-tense conventions of a headline. However, when woven into the woman preacher's sermon, the story is not simply retold. It is made to happen in the present moment. The fictive time becomes fused with the structural time.

The structural time of the poem is around 25 minutes—a not unusual length for a sermon, though perhaps a bit short for a Southern Baptist sermon. Yet the only meaningful way to conceive of the poem's structure is in terms of this structural time. Like speech, the poem transpires in time. It does not occupy space. I think we shall be misled if we endeavor to conceive of the poem's structure in even *subtly* visual terms—such as lines of uniform or corresponding lengths, a mosaic of metrical feet, rhyme schemes, stanza forms.[4] The poem's appearance on the page will upset our conventional expectations of how verse should *look*. It will drive the visually-trained grammarian wild. It will seem strange to any reader—except possibly those who have seen a literal transcription of extemporaneous speech. It will *sound* strange to all but those

who have experienced the fundamentalist sermon--which is a sermon that is actually composed extemporaneously before the congregation. I think that the structure of this poem is best conceived of when we think of it as an extemporaneous sermon. Though it is not, strictly speaking, an oral poem, it makes use of structural conventions inherent in this most viable modern relic of ancient modes of oral composition.

The extemporaneous sermon—that homiletic method so abhorred by Anglican priests in the Counter-reformation—has precursors deep within primitive oral traditions. The monumental work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord has described for us the methods of composing poetry, particularly epic tales, in a preliterate age.[10] Some of these methods we may still see at work today in fundamentalist sermonizing: a speaker appears before an audience in a clearly definable role; he has a subject which he proceeds to develop orally by means of formulas and themes within a rhythmical structure determined in part by tradition and in part by the exigencies of oral performance before a "live" audience. The preacher, as we know, will begin with a text which he interprets—using his voice to free the Lord's word from the page. He expounds on the text, oftentimes freely ranging over a host of subjects, some of them only remotely related to each other or to the text, speaking as the spirit moves him. His formulas are addresses to the audience—"O, brethren! . . . O Christians! . . . Listen, my friends. . . ." His themes are commonplaces involved in expounding on a text; the most important of these commonplaces is the final exhortation to the congregation to come forward, to make a decision for Christ. The spirit moves the preacher between the text of the Lord's word and his congregation by means of these formulas and themes, from simplistic hermaneutics to rafter-ringing exhortations. The tradition and exigencies of oral performance before this audience are best conveyed by the fundamentalist churchmember's response to a satisfying sermon: "The preacher brought a good message." The source of the message is the spirit, the bringer of the word from God and efficient cause of the preacher's rhetoric.

Such is the structure of *May Day Sermon*. The preacher has her congregation, but we are meant to believe it consists of all the women of Gilmer County. She has her text, the narrative just reviewed.[11] She creates her sermon, although this is not a Sunday morning sermon but a May Day Sermon and it is delivered outside the church. The speaking situation within which the poem "happens" is difficult to visualize because it is symbolic—as I shall discuss later, it is what all the actions and agents in the poem are in the process of becoming, a renewable force. Nonetheless, the situation is tangible enough for the poem to utilize the conventions of

fundamentalist sermonizing. Although the preacher in this case is a woman—and even though the woman recognizes that she has performed a man's role in preaching—a woman preacher would not be considered unconventional in the fundamentalist church, which is, paradoxically, one of the most liberal in allowing women into the ministry.

Her formulas are addresses to her congregation: "Children," she says over and over again. "Listen . . . O sisters . . . O daughters . . ." And her formulas are also repeated phrases, images, motifs: "each year at this time," "I shall be telling you," "fog," "snake." Her themes are the telling of the story, the fulfillment of her "text," and the continuous exhortations to the women to "rise up"—to rise up and meet not the Eternal Bridegroom but the very real and earthy lover, to answer the call of the spirit that moves through all nature and renews itself each spring. These formulas and themes break up the linearity of the narrative. They make the poem seem discontinuous and freely associative, like impassioned speech, an effect enhanced by the accumulative movement of utterances such as

> Listen listen like females each year
> In May O glory to the sound the sound of your man gone wild
> With love in the woods

Little wonder that the poem seems a jumble to those unused to *listening for* structure. Its appearance on the page offers visual clues to speech phrases—the basic "foot" of Dickey's metric. The total rhythmical structure defies visual conception—but it is apprehensible by the ear once we know how to listen.

In the process of speech, time and space are not merely transformed but brought into a unique existence. Time in this poem can be conceived of as the fourth dimension of the poem's spatial objects. The woman preacher claims that each year at this time she will be speaking this sermon. She tells the story in the present tense—not even in the *virtual* present tense of narrative conventions, not recreating the story but creating it in the present and through it participating in the emotions and motivations of the daughter. She herself becomes a part of the force which pervades all life, which renews itself in time, and which challenges all barriers to its strength, including the most rigidly held categories of thought. The woman is leaving the Baptist Church—a movement in space which has its implications in time: her spoken word is leaving its container, and like the spoken word of ancient myths regains not merely its oracular qualities but that potential which it had "in the beginning" to create life.

Her word crosses barriers in space, blurring visual distinctions

between images. All male images in the poem become fused, and so do all female images. The Lord, the Bible, God, the snake, the lover—these images flow into one another before our eyes, forming an almost overwhelming communion. The Lord gives men all the help they need to drag their daughters into barns. The Bible speaks like a father gone mad. Jehovah appears as a snake. The girl as she is being beaten seems to be dancing with God. The father, too, appears as a snake—his legs disappearing into the fog, his body "Lashing" on the floor where he is brought down by the axe. The snake with its cast-off skin, the lover's penis and its cast-off rubber, the fox hide stretched tight on the wall, the barn's center pole, nails in the wood and the throbs of lust in the flesh —all these images partake of each other. All are manifestations of a natural force—as proclaimed in a remarkable passage:

> Sisters, understand about men and sheaths:
> About nakedness: understand how butterflies, amazed pass out
> Of their natal silks how the tight snake takes a great breath bursts
> Through himself and leaves himself behind how a man casts finally
> Off everything that shields him from another beholds his loins
> Shine with his children forever burn with the very juice
> Of resurrection: such shining is how the spring creek comes
> Forth from its sunken rocks it is how the trout foams and turns on
> Himself heads upstream, breathing mist like water, for the cold
> Mountain of his birth flowing sliding in and through the egomaniacal sleep of gamecocks shooting past a man with one new blind
> Side who feels his skinned penis rise like a fish through the dark
> Woods, in a strange lifted-loving form a snake about to burst
> Through itself on May Day and leave behind on the ground still
> Still the shape of a fooled thing's body:

The daughter's mutilation of her father's corpse so that it becomes one-eyed like her lover seals the participation of all male images in each other.

All the female images in the poem represent the other side of the natural force which is drawn irresistibly into life at spring:

> Listen: often a girl in the country,
> Mostly sweating mostly in spring, deep enough in the holy Bible
> Belt, will feel her hair rise up arms rise, and this not any wish
> Of hers . . . .

The woman preacher herself is drawn. And as she tells the daughter's story, she screams and cries as she feels both her pain and her bliss. But in her role as preacher she has something of the man's role to perform, too. Thus at the first of the poem she casts herself into the image of the snake and participates with the father in beating the girl:

> as she falls and rises,
> Chained to a sapling like a tractor WHIPPED for the wind in the willow
> Tree WHIPPED for Bathsheba and David WHIPPED for the woman taken
> Anywhere anytime WHIPPED for the virgin sighing bleeding
> From her body for the sap and green of the year for her own good
> And evil . . . .

But it is the preacher's response as a woman that allows her to participate most fully in the life force she actualizes through her speech.

The spirit of this life force is imaged by the fog, which rises from Nickajack Creek and appears at times as a road. It becomes, in fact, the road on which the lovers disappear at the end of the poem. This fog pervades the countryside, sweeping through barn and house and across the boundaries of the farm. Its whiteness, naturalness and freedom contrast with the "black box" of the Bible. The farm, with its boundaries, its animals in stalls and behind fences, its fierce Lord, is "God's land," "the farm of God the father." Swept with fog it becomes "the black/ Bible's white swirling ground."

But if this is the spirit which "giveth life," that which takes life away are its opposites: as I have called them, the containers. This is true of all spatial images in the poem, including the contained word. "The letter killeth," Paul said. Only the written or printed word has letters. The Lord's word has no life when contained in the Bible—but when set free it participates in the process of life:

> —each May you hear her father scream like God
> And King James as he flails cuds richen bulls chew themselves whitefaced
> Deeper into their feed bags, and he cries something the Lord cries
> Words! Words! Ah, when they leap when they are let out of the Bible's

Black box they whistle they grab the nearest girl and do
her hair up
For her lover in root-breaking chains and she knows she was
born to hang
In the middle of Gilmer County to dance, on May Day, with
holy
Words all around her with beasts with insects . . . .

Above all, the poem is an indictment of containers, restrictions, barriers—including organized religion. The father is like the vindictive God of the Old Testament. And when he speaks his voice is "like the Lord's voice trying to find a way/ Outside the Bible." But even that word is confined to a set text. Moreover, it is that word—specifically, a passage in Obadiah—which when read aloud by the father gives the daughter the "word" she had been waiting for to bring her father down. Unlike those confined words, the poem celebrates the *process* of life, and it uses words that are themselves in process. Like extemporaneous sermonizing, the poem uses a text and frees itself from the text. But unlike extemporaneous sermonizing, it *consciously* celebrates a participatory life accessible in and through all natural processes, like spontaneous speech. The pain of love-making, the preacher argues, is "life-/ pain" which rises through the body "like the process that raised overhead" the willow—which is "uninjured" even though its branches were broken by the father to form a whip to beat the girl in his cruel parody of love-making. It is also like the process of the preacher's sermon—spontaneous but purposive, creating synthesis, participation, present actuality. The Lord belongs to the Bible, but there is yet another Word which is to be found outside:

you cannot sleep with Jehovah
Searching for what to be, on ground that has called Him from
His Book:
Shall He be the pain in the willow, or the copperhead's kingly
riding
In kudzu, growing with vines toward the cows or the wild face
working over
A virgin, swarming like gnats or the grass of the west field,
bending
East, to sweep into bags and turn brown or shall He rise, white
on white
From Nickajack Creek as a road?

The final confrontation in the poem is between whatever is static and contained and whatever is in process and free. Because the confrontation is presented in speech—the spirit and the word—process and freedom are victorious, and barriers are broken in both space and time. The letter of the law of both God and man

is broken. Yet because the speaker has so fully and freely participated she cannot condemn the daughter even for brutal murder. The daughter's action is tantamount to her own—a destruction of restraints. The father had set up his barn as an Ark of the Lord and took his daughter there to beat her in front of the animals for her sins. But even that container will not hold. The daughter sets the animals free. The preacher's last words are "the barn wanders over the earth"—like Noah's Ark, but the animals are free. So far as the preacher is concerned, the temporal confines of the story itself are broken. The lovers disappear into the fog to become part of that renewing life force to be celebrated by the preacher "each year at this time." The lovers, the preacher says, "entered my mouth your mind." Thus, the preacher's word not only removes the wedge which separates us from the past but also promises echoes into the future. Such are the barrier-breaking reverberations of the word into whose presence she seeks to bring her audience—and, we may assume, Dickey seeks to bring us.

There is, finally, a more significant movement in the structure of the poem than that between hermaneutics and exhortation, between expounding on the story and directing the congregation to accept the story's meaning. And that movement is the woman preacher's movement toward the happiness of total surrender—in her words, "Joy":

> joy like the speed of the body and rock-bottom
> Joy: joy by which the creek bed appeared to bear them out of
> the Bible
> 's farm . . . .

This emotion is, as it were, the proof of her case. The crude humor in the poem, which serves as an ironic counterpart of the violence and brutality, is a manifestation of her joy.

The woman preacher's speech is, then, a dramatization of the poem's action. But thinking of the poem in dramatic terms will short-circuit the poet's strategy in the creation of her character. The poem is not a dramatic monologue. The woman's character is not as clearly drawn as almost any persona is in, say, one of Robert Browning's poems. She is even less clearly drawn than Eliot's Tiresias—though the male-female duality of her role makes that comparison tempting. If we try to take her literally as a fundamentalist preacher in a backwoods county in Georgia, we should find her speech style improbable. She is less a person than a voice, less a character than a kind of force—as she herself acknowledges at the end of the poem. Dickey's strategy here is to create a generalized persona, less in the manner of dramatic monologues and more in the manner of the traditional lyric voice. As he admits, his purpose is to "get a fusion of inner and outer states,

of dream, fantasy, and illusion where everything partakes of the protagonist's mental processes and creates a single impression." The trappings of a specific locale, the conventions of extemporaneous sermonizing, the suggestion of a dramatic persona are all set in action through the process of speech. The argument that the preacher makes, that she and they and the action are all symbolic of the joy-giving, renewable life force, is proved by her own emotion—and will be confirmed when the reader, too, participates in that emotion.

I have been arguing that this poem should be of interest to us for the way in which it asserts the creative force of the spoken word, partly through reasserting the ancient values of oral composition. My concern in this paper has been rhetorical, in exploring the connections between the poem and us by means of certain experienceable strategies. I realize that in making this search I have left many of the poem's details unexplored, most notably the details in which the poem reverberates with religious and sexual myths. The major rhetorical strategy which I have concentrated on is perhaps the most ancient and the most continuous of all creative strategies. Our religious myths give this strategy to God, the Divine Maker or Poet, who created the world by speaking. And, so far as we know, man's primary mode of intelligence, celebration, and magic has always been the strategy of speech, except for the brief period of its almost unrelieved subversion by print. This ancient strategy is also at once, paradoxically, the source of this poem's modernity and the rationale of its violence. One seems necessarily to partake of the other. Much modern poetry is outrageous, as this poem is, but purposefully so, and part of the outrage is committed against our conventional notions of literature, letters, writing. I am not suggesting that violence may be the true art of our age or that whatever poem is violent is ipso facto modern. I am suggesting that what is happening now may be related in an important way to our rediscovery of the spoken word, and that violence seems naturally a part of what is happening now, and that whatever poem realizes the participatory nature of the spoken word deserves our attention now.

Students of communication have described modern electronic media as extensions of man's voice, which have penetrated time and space and turned the world—in McLuhan's phrase—"into a vast global village." As Walter Ong states:

> Sound, bound to the present time by the fact that it exists only at the instant when it is going out of existence, advertises presentness. It heightens presence in the sense of the existential relationship of person to person (I am in your presence; you are present to me), with which our concept of present time (as against past and future) connects: present

> time is related to us as is a person whose presence we experience. It is "here." It envelops us. Even the voice of one dead, played from a recording, envelops us with his presence as no picture can. Our sense of global unity is thus due not merely to the fact that information now moves with near-instanteity across the globe. It is also due to the electronically implemented presence of the word as sound.[12]

Perhaps, then, the urgency of our position in time and space is caused not simply by the imminent threat of complete annihilation—that may be too horrible a prospect even to contemplate or to keep unrepressed—but also by the speed, immediacy, extension, in short the *presence* of man's voice. Thanks to communication afforded to and by this voice, things can be made to happen everywhere now. A riot in Berkeley, Tokyo, Paris is seen and heard in Chicago, New York, London within moments or at the most hours after it begins. The "now" generation has discovered that it can throw its voice even into remote deliberative bodies through the ventriloquism of violence. In fact, violent protest can now become the shout heard round the world. Perhaps some historian in the distant future will look back on our epoch as a time of world revolution caused by modern communications media that paradoxically gave back to man his most primitive voice and restored to a complex technological society something of its gossippy small-town origins. Violence seems inevitably a method or an initial result of any great revolution.

But violence also shares one important attribute with the spoken word: it, too, can "heighten presence." *That* attribute of violence is, I think, more relevant to the "now" generation and to Dickey's poem than the others. The present generation is called a "now" generation not simply because it is present now but also because the past has so little relevance and the future seems so full of destructive certainties that the only significant time for existence can be *now*. The critic looks toward the past. The genuine revolutionary looks toward the future. The "now" generation seeks a way of living meaningfully in the present. Loving is one way. Violence is another. Both will break down barriers. Violence will break down the most insufferable barrier of all, anonymity. Moreover, it is not surprising that the rhetoric in modern protest utilizes methods akin to extemporaneous sermonizing. To scholars imbued with the methods of criticism, these protesting speakers seem anti-intellectual because they seem to convey no past sense, not even the "pastness" of having prepared to speak. When we turn to them as revolutionaries and ask the totally irrelevant question concerning their program for the future we receive the only relevant answer, the continued presence of violent protest.

Violence in Dickey's poem is inherently a part of the same

kind of rhetoric—less nihilistic, perhaps, though no less existential and no less a part of the spoken word's field of energy. It is a way —perhaps a thoroughly modern way—whereby the poem creates the character of its presence and makes that presence felt through the action of breaking down barriers. It creates its presence through sound and in the process wreaks violence on our conventional notions of literary language. This violence is epitomized in the actions and images within the poem itself. Perhaps violence is an inevitable method and result of creating "openness" *now*. On the other hand, the poem celebrates—in the way only the spoken word can celebrate—a renewing, ongoing life force by bringing us into the presence of that force. Its violence is the sound of categories crumbling. Its faith in the future is the promise of re-asserting its presence—less in the manner of violent protest than in the manner of a re-affirmable myth concerning the cycle force of life.

Peter Davison has argued that James Dickey is one of the two major poets of our age—the other being Robert Lowell. Davison finds Dickey's success to lie partly in the achievement of "a method which would enable him to move backward and forward in time as well as space."[13] I should argue that Dickey discovered that method in his full realization of the resonance of the spoken word. Dickey's own measure of success, as he himself has described it, is the degree to which he gets the reader to participate in the poem. When *May Day Sermon* is read aloud, it places great demands on the performer but it leads inevitably to a kind of understanding possible only through reading aloud. The arrangement of the words on the page, the absence of traditional grammatical helps, the association of images, the violence—these suddenly make sense. Meanwhile the oral reader is himself drawn into the power and energy of the poem. That, in part, is what this "new orality" in modern poetry is all about. But if what makes this poem so immediate, or relevant, or direct in its communication to us today is its "orality," that quality must be seen as an echo of the most ancient use of human speech: as a magical sound that creates presence. As Dickey has demonstrated, a poem does not need to be only the record of an experience. It can be, rather, the word whereby present life is created, resonating like a myth whose nature is the source of our immediate truth and of our faith in the future.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Paul O'Neil, "The Unlikeliest Poet," *Life*, LXI (July 22, 1966), 68.

[5] I shall refer to the text of this poem as it appears in *Poems, 1957-1967* by James Dickey (Middletown, 1967), pp. 3-13. For her invaluable assistance in explicating this poem I wish to express my gratitude to Mrs. Georgia Logan of the Department of Rhetoric, University of California, Berkeley.

[3] See *Atlantic*, July, 1967, p. 26.

[4] Chaytor was an early writer on this problem whose important work *From Script to Print* (Cambridge, Eng., 1945) was seminal. Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto, 1962) bears directly on the problem of print-orientation, as does his *Understanding Media* (New York, 1964). Of Father Ong's brilliant writings, from *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958) to *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, 1967), most reference will be made to the latest work, hereinafter referred to as *Presence*.

[5] *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, V (1963), 304-345.

[6] *Presence*, p. 279.

[7] James Dickey, "The Poet Turns on Himself," *Babel to Byzantium: Poets and Poetry Now* (New York, 1968), see esp. pp. 287, 290.

[8] Robert Beloof, *The Performing Voice in Literature* (Boston, 1966), pp. 203-222.

[9] A host of essays have charged that our concepts of prosody are disturbingly visual and thus fall behind modern developments; to cite two examples: Chad Walsh has an amusing account of his discovery, through reading aloud before college audiences, of the visualist tendencies of traditional poetry in "The Sound of Poetry in the Age of McLuhan," *Book World* of The Chicago *Tribune* (Oct. 15, 1967), p. 6. Charles Olson's popular essay on "Projective Verse" is an attempt to articulate a program for "open" verse as opposed to "closed" verse, "that verse which print bred"; see Olson's essay in Donald M. Allen, *The New American Poetry* (New York, 1960), pp. 386-397.

[10] Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), advanced Parry's earlier research.

[11] I am tempted to compare this poem in this respect with Dickey's other long poem, *Falling*, which first presents its "text"—part of the recent newsstory from the New York *Times* concerning an airline stewardess who fell to her death when an emergency door suddenly sprang open in midflight—and then expounds on the text in a style of extemporaneous speech similar to that in *May Day Sermon*. However, the style does not seem to work in *Falling* —partly, I think, because the full use of the conventions of extemporaneous speech are not employed, are not, for that matter, even appropriate, but mostly because the persona seems only to be a disembodied voice. Even the generalized lyric voice when presenting the spoken word has to have a body. It has to resonate from some perceptible "interior" regardless of how diffuse and symbolic.

[12] *Presence*, p. 101.

[13] Peter Davison, "The Difficulties of Being Major: the Poetry of Robert Lowell and James Dickey," *Atlantic* (Oct., 1967), p. 120.

LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION: THE CASE OF THE SCARLET LETTER

by David W. Noble

Thomas Kuhn, a physicist who has become a historian of science, has written a book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which was published in 1962. Here Kuhn proposed a revolutionary new approach to the study of the history of science. The established approach to the history of science, he declares, has been to see the individual scientist as making a specific contribution to our growing scientific understanding of the universe. In this view, the history of science is that of a steady progress of increasing knowledge made possible by particular discoveries of reality by particular individuals. Presumably, the individual scientist steps outside of cultural traditions which are ephemeral creations of human imagination to find an aspect of immutable natural reality. It is Kuhn's argument, however, that such an individualistic analysis of the scientist and his discoveries is false. The meaningful entity which the historian of science must study, for Kuhn, is the community not the individual. And if the historian analyzes the community of science, he discovers that the history of science is not one of steady and undramatic progress away from cultural traditions toward natural reality. Rather it is the dramatic history of the rise and fall of scientific communities based upon changing cultural traditions.

Kuhn begins his argument from the logical position that for the inquiries made by the individual scientist to be called science, they must operate within the discipline of an established paradigm about the nature of reality. The individual scientist, in order to have his experiments reach the level of methodological discipline, must be testing a hypothesis shared by other scientists who can then verify his findings through the repetition of the experimental methodology defined by the dominant paradigm itself. The contributions made by individual scientists are, according to Kuhn, the solving of puzzles which exist within the framework of the order established by the paradigm. Without a shared paradigm, there would be no structure of reality to suggest specific problems or puzzles to be solved.

The history of science for Kuhn, therefore, is a dramatic cycle of the rise and decline of dominant paradigms about the nature of reality. After a paradigm has been imaginatively created and a community of scientists forms around it, there follows the stage of normal science when the adherents assume that the paradigm is reality itself. Gradually, however, anomalies and contradictions to the paradigm are discovered. At first, they are ignored or re-

pressed. But eventually a credibility gap develops that forces the most sensitive scientists to search for a new paradigm. Finally, a new theory of reality begins to convert men from the disintegrating old order to the promise of the new.

Kuhn emphasizes that these revolutionary changes cannot be defined in those terms of linear progress which the previous school of historians of science had used to describe historical patterns. Kuhn writes, "Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life. Because it has that character, the choice is not and cannot be determined merely by the evaluative procedures characteristic of normal science, for these depend in part upon a particular paradigm, and that paradigm is at issue." Therefore, he continues, "The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience."

Since, for Kuhn, the history of science is the rise and fall of dominant paradigms, of different theories about the nature of reality, he insists that the old view of science as a progressive trend away from cultural ignorance toward an ever greater rational understanding of nature is in error. The definition of the history of science that Kuhn is rejecting is, however, only one aspect of the idea of progress which has dominated modern civilization and has set it apart from medieval civilization. The modern imagination in its political, economic, social, and artistic aspects has assumed that with the breakdown of medieval civilization men are progressing away from cultural traditions and institutions toward a direct harmony with nature. And Kuhn's book is part of the mounting attack on that idea of progress which has been gathering momentum since World War I. His focus on paradigm revolution also provides perspective on the general nature of the attack on the philosophical weakness of the modern idea of progress.

If we use Kuhn's terms to describe the revolution from medieval civilization to modern civilization, one might argue that in the crisis of the centuries from 1400 to 1700, men lost their ability to believe in the medieval paradigms. But the new paradigm to which they were converted was that of the idea of progress. This paradigm insisted that the men from the disintegrating old community did not have to form a new community. Rather they were told that each man could and must operate as a self-sufficient, self-reliant atom of reason and self-interest. They were told that to subscribe to cultural paradigms was to cut oneself off from reality as medieval man had done. To know reality, therefore, and to live in rational harmony with reality was the task of individual intelligence. Only individual intelligence could achieve such rationality because it alone was natural. Social patterns, social theories were necessarily

unnatural. They were created by imagination. They formed an alternative world to that of natural reality.

In direct contradiction to this position is Kuhn's argument that such a concept of individual autonomy is alienation from reality. He insists that one can approach reality only through community-held paradigms created by imagination. If Kuhn is correct, then we are faced with the question of why modern man created such a false theory of reality. One possible answer is that modern man postulated the concept of individual autonomy in order to escape from the tragedy of building a community which inevitably must prove inadequate and which inevitably must be replaced by another community. But if Kuhn is right, modern man did not escape, could not escape by definition from constructing paradigms, scientific, social, political, and artistic.

It is interesting that a generation before Kuhn, the literary critic, Kenneth Burke, began to argue the alienation of literary criticism from reality in much the same way that Kuhn argues the alienation of historians from reality. As Kuhn argues that the scientific enterprise depends upon the prior existence of a world of meaning projected by imagination, so Burke argues that all language by definition is a human creation by which man imposes meaning on the universe. Man, for Burke, has fallen from the Edenlike innocence of the animals who relate to their environment instinctively. Man can relate to his environment only through the verbal symbols he creates. It is this necessary community of discourse which literary critics have denied by insisting that the work of art, like the discovery of the scientist, expresses the autonomy of the artist.

But this creation of a collective artful world leads man, for Burke, into a dramatic cycle of experience which is parallel to that described by Kuhn. Men establish a community of meaning through their use of language, they establish a hierarchy of paradigms, of values. When their experience inevitably goes beyond this hierarchy of paradigms, they feel guilt. They then search for catharsis through self-mortification or the search for a scapegoat until they can achieve a sense of redemption through these means of alleviating this guilt.

Burke, who identifies all artistic expression with this cycle of human experience, seems to opt for tragic drama as that form of art which can best help man preserve his sanity through the acceptance rather than the rejection of the cycle. Self-mortification can come through the vicarious experience of the tragic hero, whose sin of pride leads to suffering. Through suffering, however, the hero comes to realize his sin of attempting to stand outside the cycle and gains redemption through his acceptance of his fate.

According to Burke, if the community cannot escape guilt through the vicarious experience of the sacrifice of the tragic hero, it turns then to a human scapegoat, which it dehumanizes, and upon which it declares war. And in waging war to escape the cycle of culture, man steadily approaches his self-destruction. Like Kuhn, therefore, Burke is using his writing to bring about a revolution in human consciousness that will end our alienation from the inevitability of revolution, the inevitable defeat of all establishments.

If major thinkers like Kuhn and Burke are attempting to teach us that revolutions are inevitable, we find ourselves in an ironic and paradoxical situation because presumably the dominant self-image of modern man has been that of a revolutionist against the medieval past. But if we look at the historians of science that Kuhn is criticizing and the literary critics that Burke is criticizing, we can see that both these groups have defined modern man as the last revolutionist. For the historians of science, the individual scientist at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation rebelling against medieval paradigms, stepped out of medieval community and did not recreate paradigms or community. Autonomous and self-sufficient, the individual scientist was not part of any pattern that could experience a cycle of growth and decay. His discoveries then became part of a timeless process of progress.

Similarly, the literary critic defined the writing of the modern novelist or poet as autonomous and self-sufficient, as unique and separate from any patterns. Modern literature, unlike classical or medieval literature, was not part of a cultural pattern, it did not express cultural paradigms. And like the discoveries of the scientists, modern literature was timeless in its escape from the life cycle of cultural patterns.

It is not surprising that twentieth-century literary critics, like twentieth-century historians of science, should believe that art exists outside of culture, because the appearance of the non-medieval art form, the novel, in the seventeenth century was based, like seventeenth-century Baconian science, on the premise of the ability of the individual to live outside of culture.

Ian Watt in his book, *The Rise of the Novel,* has described the philosophy of this middle-class artistic creation as the rejection of the medieval commitment to archetypes and ritual drama. Calling the medieval perspective symbolic and the modern seventeenth-century perspective realistic, Watt declares that "The general temper of philosophical realism has been critical, anti-traditional and innovating; its method has been the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator, who . . . is free from the body of past assumptions and traditional beliefs." The rise of

the novel, Watt continues, is part of that "vast transformation of Western civilization since the Renaissance which has replaced the unified world picture of the Middle Ages with another very different one—one which presents us essentially with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places."

But Richard Chase in his study of American literature, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, argues that the American novel when it appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century broke sharply from this individualistic and realist pattern. Defining the American novel as romance, he continues, "Doubtless the main difference between the novel and the romance is the way in which they view reality. The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. It takes a group of people and sets them going about the business of life. We come to see these people in their real complexity of temperament and motive. . . . Historically, the novel has served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class.

By contrast the romance, following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail . . . character itself becomes, then, somewhat abstract and ideal. . . . Astonishing events may occur. And these are likely to have a symbolic or ideological, rather than a realistic plausibility. Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic forms."

In contrast to this definition of realism as the description of individual experience without the imposition of mythic, allegorical or symbolic meaning as used by both Watt and Chase, Kuhn and Burke, of course, insist that the reality of human experience always presupposes such an imposition of mythic, allegorical or symbolic meaning. If the historian, Kuhn, and the literary critic, Burke, are now attempting to establish a pattern of rational interpretation and discourse around this insight, it follows from their own theory that this insight first found expression in the creativity of artistic imagination. And given Chase's description of the American novel as romance it is possible that among early nineteenth-century American novelists, one finds an early critique of modern individualism and realism and one of the first attempts to restore an understanding of the importance of symbols to our consciousness. It is possible that these novelists perceived the falsity of the idea of progress as a steady withdrawal of men from disharmonious culture toward harmony with nature and a century before Burke and Kuhn argued the necessary drama of cultural revolution.

This possibility is fulfilled in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Clearly, Hawthorne was aware that his nineteenth-

century Americans were the descendents of seventeenth-century Puritans who, in stepping out of medieval civilization, were attempting to escape the responsibility of creating a new community which would go through a cycle of life and death. Like Kuhn and Burke, however, Hawthorne was certain that it was the very nature of man to engage in such creativity and that no amount of Puritan repression could contain this instinct of creativity.

In Chase's terms, the novel is clearly a romance because its major characters are archetypes and the intent of the book is to teach through allegory. The first archetypical figure is Roger Chillingworth. He is presented as the representative spokesman for Puritan theology, "a figure of the study and the cloister," who has turned away from the variety of life to the unity of philosophy. This man of abstract ideals has momentarily captured part of the living community of England, the young woman, Hester Prynne. It is because she is the child of the dying medieval world that Chillingworth has been able to possess her.

In symbolic terms, Hester Prynne represents the feminine life force from which the future will be born. In the exhausted and dying medieval world, however, there is no male who can impregnate her with the future. She must find her husband, therefore, from among the men of the new order. But Chillingworth, in taking her as his wife, is not capable of becoming the father of her child because of his theological commitment to timeless perfection. He wants no new form to issue out of Hester's womb, which would share the mortality of the medieval mother and experience a cycle of life and death.

Ultimately, he sends Hester to New England while he remains in Europe. In Hawthorne's symbolism, the Old World theology has sent human beings into the New World wilderness in the hope that there they will not engage in the creativity of new forms of community but only live in harmony with timeless physical nature. Given their indoctrination by Puritanism, these men and women attempt to deny their humanity and their lives are described by Hawthorne as lacking in beauty, as grey and grim in style and empty in content.

But, for Hawthorne, the Puritan dream of lifeless perfection is not only ugly, it is a denial of human reality. The settlers cannot escape their instinct to create, to give birth to a future community. The archetypical young Puritan minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, against all of the teachings of his theological father, Chillingworth, must therefore enter into sexual communion with Hester Prynne and father a child, Pearl.

In Kuhn's terminology of the conflict between the established scientific paradigm and its challenger, the new paradigm is always

considered illegitimate until it converts the community to its validity. And Pearl, the symbol of a new life form, must be considered illegitimate by the Puritans as long as they believe that it is their duty to suppress the appearance of positive new forms of community.

The story begins, therefore, with the banishment of Hester from the community because she has born a child out of wedlock. And to ensure that she is recognized as a sinner, she is forced to wear a scarlet letter on her breast. But when Hester steps out of the prison with her child and with the "A" emblazoned on her dress, Hawthorne contrasts her radiant beauty with the drab ugliness of the other women who, unlike Hester, still repress life rather than bearing it. Hawthorne also presents the mother and child as potential salvation figures when he writes that the Puritan "might have seen in this beautiful woman, so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity . . . of that sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world." Only by accepting the worth of Pearl, of this illegitimate form, can the Puritans escape the life-denying theology of Chillingworth. But symbolically represented by their young minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, the Puritans cannot bring themselves to admit that they have given birth in the New World to a new form of community, beautiful in its mortality. Loving Hester and Pearl, Arthur nevertheless believes it is his duty as a preacher of the Puritan faith to deny his relationship to them.

Chillingworth now appears in the New World to purge that man who has betrayed his theology of non-creativity. And Hawthorne dramatizes his argument that it is impossible for humanity to live by this life-denying outlook when he isolates Chillingworth from this community of his followers. Chillingworth comes out of the forest into the town and throughout the story continues to be identified with the forest. Choosing timeless perfection, he has chosen the world of nature rather than the world of man. And the people of the town while they give lip service to this inhuman ideal are like Dimmesdale because they cannot deny their human instincts.

Collectively, they secretly admire Hester and seek identification with her because they sense her superior humanity, they sense that "God, as a direct consequence of the sin which was thus punished, had given her a lovely child . . . to connect her parent forever with the race and descent of mortals." Hester becomes a spiritual leader of the community. She gave herself to helping the spiritually and physically ill. Her nature was so "warm and rich; a wellspring of human tenderness;" she demonstrated "so much helpfulness, power to do, power to sympathesize," that the people

took her to their hearts and changed the meaning of her scarlet letter to "A for Able."

Similarly, Dimmesdale, because of his participation in the sin of creative love, has become the most beloved man in the town. Still officially sinless, his parishioners nevertheless sense his ability to understand and share their weaknesses and imperfections. Unlike Chillingworth, he can minister to the spiritual sickness of people. It is his commitment to the rhythm of life and death in the form of his mortal child "that gave him sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, so that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs, and received their pain unto itself."

The positive contribution of Dimmesdale and Hester to the community, however, is incomplete because they have not taught the people to openly reject Chillingworth's theology. Arthur has not confessed his paternity of Pearl and the concept of her illegitimacy has not been destroyed. Arthur, Hester, and Pearl have not been recognized as a new community, truer, better, and more beautiful than the Puritan community because it symbolizes the reality of the life cycle of the human community. The irony for Hawthorne then is that still the prisoner of Chillingworth's life-denying theology, Dimmesdale's strength is being eaten away and Chillingworth is his physician, living in his house, treating his body but destroying his soul. Unable to tolerate any longer the progressive destruction of her lover, Hester reveals Chillingworth's identity as her husband to Dimmesdale and informs him that Chillingworth has sworn to revenge himself on the father of her child.

The revelation takes place in the forest which is Chillingworth's domain and it is in the forest that Arthur and Hester plan to run away. The irony of their situation has reached its most extreme point. Chillingworth has sent Hester, the symbolic bearer of new life, away from the human community of Europe and into the American forest in the hope that she will there remain barren. He has sent Dimmesdale, the young male, into the American forest in the hope that he will not father a new human community. Instinctively, Hester and Arthur have formed such a new community in the figure of Pearl. But as long as they refuse to acknowledge their role as parents of a mortal form, they will remain Chillingworth's prisoners.

In the forest, Hester tears the scarlet letter from her breast and "all at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven, forth burst the sunshine, pouring a very flood into the obscure forest, gladdening each green leaf, transmuting the yellow fallen ones to gold. . . . Such was the sympathy of Nature—that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law nor illumined by higher truth—with the bliss of these two spirits."

For Hawthorne, who has pictured Chillingworth as the devil, this is the devil's temptation urging Hester to escape from the responsibility of human community. And since Arthur has never accepted responsibility for Pearl, he has consigned her to Nature, to Chillingworth, to the devil. To be alone together, Hester and Arthur have sent Pearl deeper into the forest and "The great black forest . . . became the playmate of the lonely infant somber as it was, it put on the kindest of moods to welcome her. It offered her the partridge berries. . . . A pigeon allowed Pearl to come underneath, and uttered a sound as much of greeting as alarm. . . . A wolf, it is said,—but here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable,—came up, and smelt of Pearl's robe, and offered his savage head to be patted by her hand. The truth seems to be, however, that the mother-forest, and the wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child."

Pearl is incomplete, however, unfulfilled in her wilderness. Her body has the strength of nature but her soul is weak because she has no father to teach her that she has a responsible relationship to "the sinful brotherhood of mankind." She would remain wild, Hawthorne wrote, until she experienced "a grief that should deeply touch her, and thus humanize and make her capable of sympathy."

Pearl, the symbolic form of human community, must, therefore, reach out to her parents. She wants the protection of Dimmesdale and not the forest. From the moment she could talk, she insisted that Hester tell her the name of her father. And always she has vehemently rejected her mother's answer that she has only a heavenly father, that she is the child of a virgin birth. Now as she returns to her mother and father from the depths of the forest, she discovers that Hester has thrown away the scarlet letter and Pearl violently rejects this mother who attempts to identify with the artlessness of nature. It is only when Hester reluctantly replaces the "A" on her bosom that Pearl will come to her side. "Now thou art my mother indeed," Pearl will tell Hester when she once more accepts her relationship to the artful human community. Hester then asks her daughter to give the minister her love. But Pearl inquires in return, "Doth he love us? Will he go back with us, hand in hand, we three together into the town?" When she receives a negative reply, she refuses this man who will not accept his public responsibility for his child, washing away his kiss with the water of the brook.

Arthur and Hester have decided to return to the town separately, there to arrange a passage to Europe. This decision by Arthur to flee his responsibility for Pearl, for human community, brings him to the brink of becoming completely Chillingworth's son—the son of the devil. Previously, he has preached Chillingworth's

theology of lifeless perfection but he has practiced human involvement. To flee would be to renounce that human involvement. As he returns to the town, Arthur at last recognizes that he is being tempted by the devil and that he cannot escape Satan until he accepts responsibility for the human form which he has helped to create, for the new community which is replacing the medieval past.

In self-conscious communion with spiritual truth for the first time in his life, he sits up the entire night writing an election sermon to be delivered in honor of the new governor. It is a sermon that he writes from the inspiration of his heart and not with the cold logic of Chillingworth's theory. When he delivers the sermon the next day, he speaks to the people not about the timeless perfection of the present but about the love and beauty which will fill a timeful future. His delivery of this vision of fruitful days to come transcends ordinary speech. His words seem to sing with all the beauty of magnificent music. When he walks from the church, the congregation breaks from their pattern of puritanical restraint and cheers him. Wildly, they applaud this man who has given them hope for a richer life than the sterile perfection they now suffer.

Arthur Dimmesdale walks directly from the church to the scaffold because the fulfillment of his prophecy depends upon his action. The liberation of his people from the curse of Chillingworth depends upon his sacrifice. His death must be motivated by his love for the mortality of mankind and not by Chillingworth's black desire for revenge against sin.

Waiting in the holiday crowd for the ceremonies of election to be concluded are Hester and Pearl. Hester has come expecting Arthur to join her in the crowd and slip away together to the ship. But from the opening procession, she senses a change in him and guesses that he has changed his mind. Then as she stands watching the proceedings, she is joined by the captain of the ship on which they had booked passage. He informs her that Chillingworth has also arranged passage, identifying himself as one of their party. Chillingworth intuitively knows their plan. Fulfilling his theology, they must carry him wherever they go. But now Arthur calls for Hester and Pearl to join him on the scaffold. Chillingworth accompanies them and pleads with desperate vehemence for the minister not to confess. If Dimmesdale, the best of the Puritans, reveals he is human and not a saint, Chillingworth will lose control of this family, he will lose control of the humanity they symbolize. Finally, in the agony of defeat and destruction, he hisses at the minister, "Hadst thou sought the whole earth over . . . there was no place so secret,—no high place nor lowly place, where thou couldst have escaped me,—save on this very scaffold." Arthur Dimmesdale tears open his shirt and reveals to the world the scarlet

letter indelibly stamped over his heart. He has transcended the temptation of Hester's cry to "Begin all anew! . . . Whither leads yonder forest-track? . . . Deeper it goes, and deeper, into the wilderness. . . . There thou art free!" He has recognized that in the forest one is only free to choose, like Roger Chillingworth, "to withdraw his name from the roll of mankind." He knows that in the wilderness his only choice is to live with the sterile theology of Chillingworth. Abandoning the sterility of innocence, Arthur calls for his daughter, " 'My little Pearl . . . dear little Pearl, wilt thou kiss me now? Thou wouldst not yonder in the forest! But now thou wilt?'

"Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it."

Certainly, Hawthorne, in 1840, anticipated Kuhn's argument in 1960 that the world of medieval cultural paradigms must be replaced by modern cultural paradigms and that the reality of human experience could not be that of progress from culture to nature. He also anticipated Kuhn's argument that the transition from paradigm to paradigm comes through the leap of conversion. Dimmesdale could never escape the logic of Chillingworth's theology as long as he accepted its basic premises. His only escape was to reject the totality of Puritan theology and give his loyalty to another theology.

In anticipating Kuhn's argument for the necessity of cultural revolution, for the cycle of life and death for humanly created forms, Hawthorne also anticipated Burke's theory of the guilt mankind feels for the creation of such a pattern. And, like Burke, Hawthorne opted for tragic drama as that form of art by which man can accept rather than reject the reality of the cycle. Chillingworth searches for the scapegoat which, according to Burke, is the self-destructive means men have for alleviating their guilt feeling. Dimmesdale, however, is Burke's tragic hero who has committed the sin of pride in attempting to stand outside the cycle. Through his suffering, however, he has gained self-knowledge and his sacrifice of himself, his self-mortification, gives the community the possibility of redemption, of spiritual health, rather than the self-destruction and spiritual sickness which would have come if the community had followed Chillingworth in his pursuit of the scapegoat.

If Hawthorne is at all representative of a tradition in American literature attacking the belief of modern man that medieval culture need not be replaced by another culture and that progres-

sively men are moving away from culture toward nature, then perhaps Burke and Kuhn do not represent the beginning of a new post-modern perspective but rather the maturing of a perspective which began in the early nineteenth century when American writers rejected the realistic novel in favor of the romance.

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At the University of Minnesota, Professor David W. Noble's courses in American intellectual history are among the most popular on campus. For those of us who may harbor misgivings about the relationship between popularity and scholarly content, the existence of these courses is reassuring (unless, of course, we are attempting to rationalize our own lack of popularity). He has written two books, *Historians Against History* (University of Minnesota Press, 1965) and *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden: The Central Theme in the American Novel* (Braziller, 1968) dealing with theories of history and literature. Mr. Noble was the first Minnesota faculty member to be included as a principal lecturer in this series of symposia.